

Does an in-class note-taker help freshmen take better notes in a general education course?



Rebekka Darner Gougis, PhD
Assistant Professor of Biology Education
School of Biological Sciences



Emma K. Kombrink
Elementary Education Major
School of Teaching & Learning



Rebecca Elliot
Coordinator of Academic Services
Julia N. Visor Academic Center



Pamm Ambrose, MS
Associate Director
University College

Background

Note-taking is an essential skill that supports success in large enrollment post-secondary courses, as well as the workplace in a variety of career tracks. Despite this, many university faculty note that freshmen in large enrollment general education courses lack note-taking skills or at least do not put them to good use. Note-taking challenges thus hinder student success in courses where students are expected to refer to class notes when studying and/or completing assignments.

Methods

1. This study was conducted in a general education biology course in Fall 2014.
2. During Unit 1 of the course, no note-taker was present in the lecture.
3. During Unit 2 of the course, the note-taker attended lectures and took notes that were projected alongside lecture slides.
4. Literature (i.e., Ellis, 2006) was referenced to create a rubric to score note quality (handout).
5. 12 participants provided notes from both units, which were coded using the developed rubric.
6. A correlation analysis was performed to see if note-quality correlated with exam scores.
7. Unit 1 and Unit 2 note quality was compared using a paired t-test.

Research Questions

1. Is the quality of notes taken when a note-taker is present in lecture better than that of when there is no note-taker?
2. Do students who take better notes achieve higher exam scores?

Results

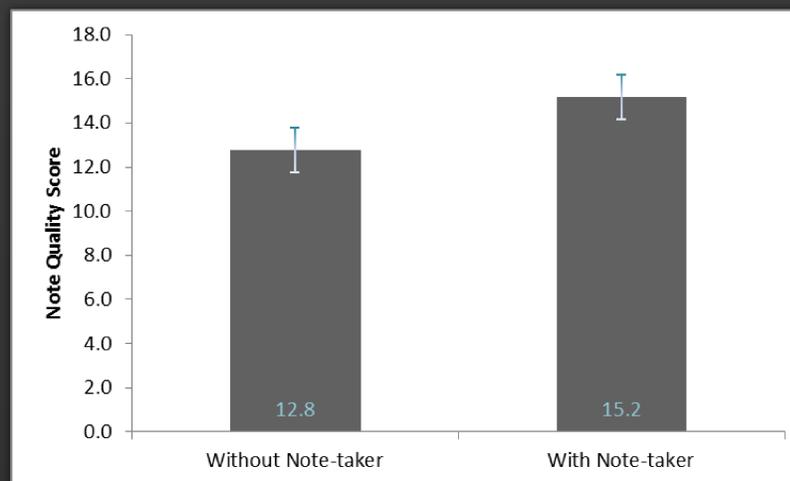
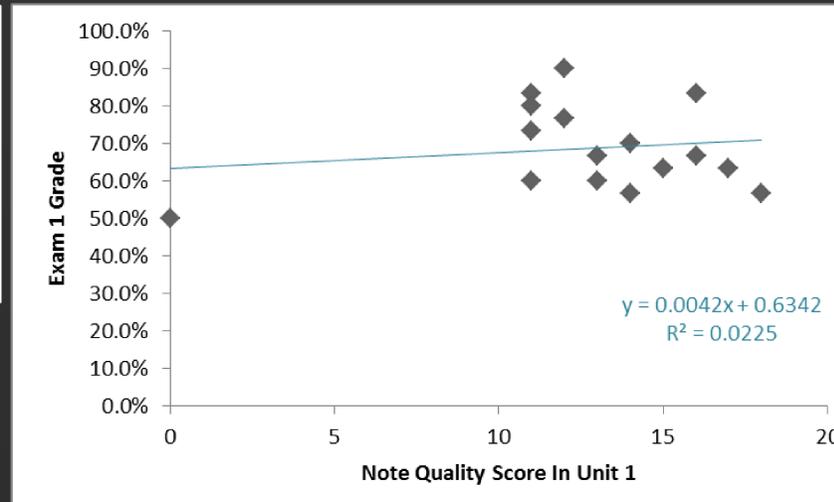


Figure 1. Students took notes of better quality when there was a note-taker in class, as measured by the developed rubric. Error bars indicate standard error of the mean. Results were statistically significant. $t = 2.04$, $df = 11$, $p = 0.033$.

Figure 2. Although not statistically significant, the quality of students' notes positively correlated with exam scores.



Tentative Conclusions

- Students who take better notes tended to do better on exams, although there are other more important factors affecting achievement on exams.
- Having an in-class note-taker significantly correlates with the quality of students' notes.

Limitations

- Although a sample size of 20 was sought, fewer students provided their notes to be coded for both course units ($n=12$).
- A confounding factor potentially leading to higher quality Unit 2 notes is that students may have become accustomed to college and its demands, leading to better notes.

References

Ellis, D. (2006). "Notes" in *Becoming a Master Student* (pp. 159-185). St. Charles: Houghton Mifflin Company.

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